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Douglas Hale

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**ONE MAN'S WAR:  
CAPTAIN JOSEPH H. BRUTON, 1861-1865**

*by Douglas Hale*

Nothing like the Civil War has ever happened to the American people, before or since. In its extent, duration, cost in lives and property, and the lasting enmities engendered, it was more like the hideous conflicts of the twentieth century than the limited wars of Europe in its own time. Throughout the South, the war slaughtered many of the best men the land had produced, destroyed a modest prosperity so painfully achieved, disrupted families, and caused endless suffering. Like their neighbors in Nacogdoches County, Texas, Joseph Bruton and his wife Ellen were swept up in this vicious whirlwind; they never knew where it would take them for four long and bloody years. Every day was filled with uncertainty and ominous prospects. All they could do was wait, live as normally as possible, and hope. As Joseph gravely observed to his wife on more than one occasion, "Though it is likely we may never see each other again on earth let us live so that we meet in heaven." How the Captain and his family met the challenge of those tragic times is the subject of this essay.

Nobody really planned for the war to develop as it did; it just seemed to grow spontaneously into a monstrous horror. Following the election of Abraham Lincoln in November, 1860, secessionist hysteria spread across Texas as it had through the other southern states. Though Governor Sam Houston urged calm moderation and the perpetuation of the Union, other political leaders demanded a special convention to rule on the question of secession. Dominated by radical opinion and inflamed by reckless rhetoric, the convention voted to secede from the Union on February 1, 1861, by a vote of 166 to 8. Three weeks later, this momentous decision was ratified by a general referendum of the people, who voted overwhelmingly—46,129 to 14,697—to secede.

Within a month Texas had formally joined the Confederacy. The Secession Convention dismissed the Unionist Houston and named Lieutenant Governor Edward Clark in his place. After news of the firing on Fort Sumter reached him late in April, 1861, Clark began the haphazard and disjointed process of mobilization for defense. By September, Texas had already organized ten regiments of volunteers, and they were placed at the service of the Confederacy. By the end of the war, some 88,000 Texans (96% of the white male population of military age) would serve the armies of the South.<sup>1</sup>

Among the first military units created in that frenzied spring were irregular companies or defense patrols which sprang up spontaneously

all over the state. On May 22, 1861, the County Court of Nacogdoches County commissioned Joseph Bruton as captain of his precinct patrol and placed twelve of his neighbors under his command. Bruton's military career had begun. He was already thirty-four years old and had a wife and four children to support. He was certainly neither a war lover nor a fanatic exponent of the "Glorious Cause." Bruton was simply a moderately prosperous farmer, a slave owner, and a natural leader in the Linn Flat community. The war had caught him.'

But his real military service did not begin until the following spring. At the beginning of 1862, most of the 25,000 Texans that had so far volunteered were scattered about in small units apart from any general organizational structure. Between January and May, the Confederacy created a regional command, the Trans-Mississippi Department, regularized recruitment and supply, mustered state units into Confederate service, and imposed military conscription. As part of this massive mobilization, Bruton enlisted in Company H of the 17th Texas Cavalry on March 10, 1862. This regiment, consisting of about a thousand men, marched to Shreveport, Louisiana, where it joined others charged with the task of defending Arkansas and Louisiana from Federal invasion.'

The security of these two states was contingent upon a much larger consideration: who would control the Mississippi River? Though the leaders of the Union had been generally devoid of a grand strategy at the beginning of the war, the significance of the great waterway was so patently obvious that it could not escape even their myopic gaze. By employing their naval superiority to capture and control the river, the Yankees could split the South in two and at the same time give the upper Midwest an outlet to the Gulf for its shipping. Control of the Mississippi necessarily involved the conquest of a number of its tributaries in Arkansas and Louisiana. The first major step toward gaining command of the river was Admiral Farragut's bold capture of New Orleans in April, 1862. Another fourteen months of hard campaigning faced the Union forces, however, before they could unlock the gates of the Mississippi.

Joseph Bruton's first military experiences came as the result of this overriding strategic goal of the North. In the spring of 1862, it appeared that Arkansas and Louisiana would soon inevitably fall to the Yankee enemy, since most of the defenders of the region had been transferred across the Mississippi to the more important theaters of operation in the East. The valley of the Arkansas River and the road to Little Rock seemed open to the Union forces in May, 1862. Into this vacuum stepped Confederate Major General T. C. Hindman. He recruited thousands of fresh troops, requisitioned supplies, enforced military conscription, declared martial law, and shot deserters. Soon



*Joseph Henry Bruion*  
1826-c.1876



*Mary Ellen Bruion*  
1831-1897

he had gathered about his headquarters at Little Rock a formidable force of twenty thousand men to repel the expected invaders.<sup>5</sup>

The 17th Texas Regiment was part of this hasty mobilization of forces to save Arkansas. Bruton rode north from Shreveport through the rain-soaked, impoverished countryside around Camden, Arkansas, and arrived at his camp near Little Rock on May 20. It had been a toilsome ordeal, the first of many to come. Measles struck down scores from his regiment, and the sick and dying young men were strung out all along the line of march. Food and forage were miserable. Bitter dissension had broken out among the troops. The new conscription law had just taken effect, and men who had volunteered for a year now found themselves bound to the service for three years or the duration of the war. The proud Texans were told they would soon lose their horses: the Confederacy needed infantry, and Bruton's company was among those cavalry units ordered to be dismounted. Looming over all was a strong Federal army only thirty-five miles away whose attack was anticipated daily.<sup>6</sup>

In order to resolve some of these problems, the 17th Regiment was reorganized at Little Rock. The regimental commander resigned, and Colonel James R. Taylor, a graduate of Larissa College, was elected to take his place. Bruton got a new company commander as well, and even entered the electoral contest himself. At least as an officer he might be able to keep his horse. But, as he wrote Ellen,

"I run for first Lieutenant and was beet one vote by F. L. McKnight. Capt. White used his influence for McKnight. Their was about 30 of our boys behind sick was what beet me."

The concentration of Rebel troops around the Arkansas capital effectively stalled the Federal advance against Little Rock. After several bloody skirmishes, the Yankees elected to withdraw eastward to Helena instead, where they would enjoy the support of their gunboats on the Mississippi. The most important of these encounters took place at Cache Bayou on July 6 and 7, when the Confederates tried to hold the crossing against the retreating Union army. The 17th Regiment was sent against the rear of the Federal troops but never got into action, since the Yankees succeeded in brushing aside the Rebel holding force and arrived safely at Helena on July 13, 1862.<sup>7</sup>

For the next four months, central Arkansas remained relatively quiet. The Texans regretfully sent their horses home, went into garrison duty at Camp Hope in the wooded hill country about twenty-five miles northeast of Little Rock, and spent their days in tedious infantry drill and tending the sick. The commander of H Company resigned, and Bruton, more politically successful this time, was elected to take his place on July 23, 1862.<sup>8</sup>

Being a captain did not alter Bruton's opinion of the army and the war very much, though he retained his usual good nature throughout. As he wrote his wife, "I am not happy by no means but I try to make the best of it I can."<sup>10</sup> He was not unduly impressed by the trappings of rank or the imperatives of military protocol, but he was a conscientious officer, especially where the welfare of his men was concerned. When Brigadier General H. E. McCulloch, his divisional commander, inspected his company, Captain Bruton reported to Ellen that

He is a verry plain comon looking man. In fact if you were going out to kill a general you would never kill him if you did not know him. He lectured the captains each for some time. He caused me to shed tears in relating to me my duty towards the men. He is verry religious in all his lectures. He cautioned me about taking care of the young men [in] particular.<sup>11</sup>

For Bruton, being an officer not only carried with it the heavy responsibility for other men's lives. It also brought such petty annoyances as vainly trying to get a decent uniform from Richmond, when there was no cloth to be had, or a pair of boots from Nacogdoches, when not even the best of friends could be trusted to deliver such precious articles as boots.

Throughout it all, however, his main thoughts and concerns were those of home. "Ellen," he wrote, "you can not amagion how I want to see you and the children."<sup>12</sup>

The only satisfaction I see is reading your letters & the hope of meeting you and the children again at home. It does seem to me that those persons who are permitted to stay at home with their families ought to bee the happiest people of the world. I acknowledge that I never new until now how happy I ought to have been when permitted to stay at home with my family, but [for us] that live to get home it will probably be an advantage too.<sup>13</sup>

Joseph Bruton knew that the war was no easier for his wife than it was for him. Not the least of Ellen's "grief and troubles" came from keeping the farm going while her husband was away. Fortunately, prior to his departure, the Captain had engaged a tenant, Mr. Corley, who with his family worked the place for one-fifth of the crop and \$100 in cash per year. Corley's services had become so necessary that by October Bruton was willing to pay "almost any price"—up to a dollar a day—to keep him on.<sup>14</sup> He also relied upon his four adult slaves to do their part in maintaining an orderly operation. Joseph advised his wife when to sell corn and mules, what to do about a saddle and pony for his eldest daughter, Bettie, and requested a photograph of his two youngest children, Joella and Jesse. He frequently closed his letters with the warm valediction: "Kiss the children for me and except one for yourself. Tell the negroes howdy for me."<sup>15</sup>

While the Little Rock front remained quiet during the fall, important battles were being fought to both the east and the west. In October, 1862, Grant's victory at Corinth, Mississippi, prepared the way for his campaign against Vicksburg. Shortly thereafter, Federal successes at Cane Hill and Prairie Grove in northwestern Arkansas forced a Confederate withdrawal south to Little Rock. Situated about half way between these two points of conflict, Bruton's division played no role in either of them, and his regiment was reduced to futile and pointless maneuvering. On Oct. 1, the 17th Texas was abruptly dispatched to the east in the middle of the night. From their garrison at Camp Hope, the sore-footed Texans slogged sixty-five miles through the rain to Clarendon, Arkansas, remained there a few days, and then marched back.<sup>54</sup> All Bruton derived from this exercise was a chronic case of diarrhea. "I never saw as much water on the ground in my life," he complained. "We traveled all day in water some times over knee deep . . . We do not no why we went their nor why we came back."<sup>55</sup>

At the end of 1862 their mission became much clearer. Grant launched his eight-months-long campaign down the Mississippi against Vicksburg, the last major Confederate stronghold on the river. The Rebel troops in Arkansas and Louisiana were called upon to help frustrate Grant's plans. Late in November, their commander shipped several regiments, including the 17th Texas Dismounted Cavalry, from their garrison near Little Rock 117 miles down the Arkansas River to Arkansas Post. Founded by the French in 1686, this village was the oldest European settlement in the state. It lay only about twenty-five miles upriver from the confluence of the Arkansas with the Mississippi.

On the river bank below the village, the Rebels had constructed a formidable redoubt which they dubbed Fort Hindman. It consisted of a square rampart of heavy timber and earthworks one hundred yards on a side. The parapets were eighteen feet high, and from its casemates two nine-inch guns and one eight-inch gun commanded the river, as did more than a dozen lighter pieces of artillery. Fort Hindman was intended as a strongpoint from which Rebel forces could sally forth to interdict Yankee shipping on the Mississippi.<sup>56</sup>

With the newly arrived Texans, the garrison of the fortress consisted of about five thousand men under the command of Brigadier General Thomas J. Churchill. The troops in Bruton's regiment set about digging infantry entrenchments in the mud flats around the fort and fitting up cabins for their winter quarters. Conditions were rugged, illness was rife, and the troops were restive. One observed sourly that "This country was never made . . . for white people to live in; nothing but frogs and craw fish can live here long . . . I don't think the Yankees would have it if they could get it."<sup>57</sup>

He was wrong. No sooner had the men at Fort Hindman attracted the enemy's attention than he attacked them in overwhelming force. On Christmas Day, Rebel scouts from the fort had captured the Yankee steamer *Blue Wing* on the nearby Mississippi and brought it back to their redoubt. To their delight, they discovered that this vessel was carrying not only ammunition, which they needed, but also flour, coffee, salt, apples, and whiskey, which considerably brightened their cheerless Christmas. At about the same time, Major General William T. Sherman had made an unsuccessful attack on Vicksburg. He had subsequently reembarked the 32,000 troops in his assault force on their transports and withdrew up river to await further orders. Early in January, 1863, Brigadier General John A. McClernand came into temporary command of these men. Having no other immediate employment for them, he resolved to use his formidable force to capture Fort Hindman and thus eliminate the threat it posed to federal shipping on the Mississippi.

McClernand steamed up the Arkansas and on January 10, 1863, opened a devastating bombardment on the fort from his three ironclads and six gunboats. Simultaneously, thirty thousand Yankees descended from their transports and surrounded the Rebel infantry dug in around the redoubt. The result was a military disaster for the South. General Churchill's superior had ordered him "to hold out till help arrived or until all dead." After a four-hour bombardment on the eleventh, however, Fort Hindman was a shambles. The boys in the rifle pits saw themselves surrounded by a host of Yankees that covered the ground. Some of the Rebel defenders began showing the white flag, and to his mortification, Churchill had no recourse but surrender. The Confederates lost only sixty killed, but 4791 men were taken captive by the North.<sup>20</sup>

Captain Bruton and his company were now prisoners of war. Normally, they would have been shipped down to Vicksburg for prisoner exchange. Since Grant was even then besieging the place, however, this would be patently absurd. Moreover, the Confederate president had threatened to take punitive action against captured Union officers, and the routine process of exchange had broken down. Instead, the Yankees first shipped their prisoners to St. Louis and confined the men to their transports on Arsenal Island. At the end of January, the Union officials interned the 450 officers from Fort Hindman at Camp Chase, Columbus, Ohio, while the enlisted men were distributed among other camps.

Conditions at Camp Chase were harsh and hazardous that winter. Many Confederate officers died from smallpox and pneumonia. Their captors confiscated the food and clothing parcels they received and deprived them of blankets, personal articles, and money. All "superfluous" clothing was literally stripped from their backs prior to their



transfer to the east for exchange. By the middle of May, 1863, the officers and men of the 17th Texas who survived the ordeal had been exchanged at the transfer point near Petersburg, Virginia, and were on their way back home. Bruton had been lucky: after only three days in the military hospital at Richmond, he rejoined his command and was furloughed back to Texas.<sup>2</sup>

The war still had two more bloody years to go, however. In June what was left of Captain Bruton's regiment reassembled in East Texas and marched to Shreveport, headquarters of Lieutenant General Edmond Kirby Smith, Confederate commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department. The fate and function of his forces were thrown into grave uncertainty a few weeks later. In July, 1863, Vicksburg and Port Hudson fell to Grant's armies, and control of the Mississippi passed to the North. Now Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas were cut off from their sister states and threatened by invasion at many points. Kirby Smith could not know from which direction the major Federal thrust would come. Little Rock fell to the Union forces in September, but the main danger seemed to lie to the south, where Major General Nathaniel B. Banks, commander of the Department of the Gulf, was assembling an army at New Orleans which might cut across Louisiana and Texas at any time. In September, 1863, Banks confirmed this threat by his abortive attempt to invade Texas via Sabine Pass. Under the circumstances, Kirby Smith could merely reorganize and strengthen his command in northern Louisiana and hold the bulk of it in readiness until the Union commander revealed his hand.

As part of this effort at reorganization, on July 1, General Kirby Smith took the remnants of those seven Texas regiments which had been overwhelmed at Arkansas Post—soldiers of the 15th, 17th, 18th, 24th, and 25th Cavalry and the 6th and 10th Infantry Regiments—and combined them into the 17th Consolidated Regiment, Texas Dismounted Cavalry. Bruton's former colonel, James R. Taylor, assumed command of the unit, while Bruton himself was named captain in charge of Company G. Kirby Smith then ordered the 17th to Alexandria, Louisiana, where on October 13, 1863, it joined five other Texas regiments to form a brigade under Brigadier General Camille Armand Jules Marie, Prince de Polignac.

The Texans called their unlikely new commander "Polecat." Of impeccable aristocratic lineage, he was the son of the last premier of King Charles X of France. Having served in the Crimean War, the Frenchman was in Central America when the Civil War began and elected to commit his military training and experience to the side of the South. His brigade was merged with the Army of Western Louisiana, Major General Richard Taylor, commanding. Since the fall of 1863

was comparatively quiet in his sector, Polignac drilled his troops and directed his energies to the problems of discipline and supply. During the winter, the brigade ranged through the bayou country between Alexandria and Monroe, Louisiana, held the line along the Ouachita River, and launched occasional raids against Federal gunboats and supply depots as far east as the Mississippi.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, on the first day of 1864, Captain Joseph Bruton found himself at Camp Allen, near Monroe, Louisiana. All things considered, it was a good day. The weather was cool and clear, the land was high and dry, and provisions were adequate. He had only recently returned from a long leave at home. As a New Year's treat, he had enjoyed a special dinner: "a pot of boiled peas and bacon and a potatoe pudding." As he admitted to his wife, "so far as living is concerned we are doing well."<sup>24</sup>

But the dull, empty pang of homesickness was still there. "Today has been a verry lonesome day to me," he wrote. "Not much doing and when that [is] the case I am studicing about you and the children."<sup>25</sup> There were more practical concerns for home as well. With the draft snatching up every able-bodied man, Bruton had lost his former tenant. Now the new man, Mr. Weatherly, seemed about to be conscripted too. The Captain owed \$500.00 on the farm and needed to sell his corn crop to raise the money. Were the livestock properly cared for? Were all the fences falling down? Bruton had brought Tom, his Negro manservant, back to camp with him. Tom's wife belonged to a neighboring farmer. The Captain, desiring to keep Tom and his wife together, was willing to trade four hundred acres of his land for her. Could Ellen handle all these complex responsibilities alone?<sup>26</sup> She had to, for events in the spring of 1864 made it impossible for her husband to come home for almost a year.

These events revolved around the invasion of Texas. From the very beginning of the war, the Union high command had recognized the obvious strategic significance of such a move. At one stroke, the North could encourage Unionist sentiment in the Lone Star State, detach it from the Confederacy, and win its cotton for the merchants of New York and the mills of New England. But the conquest of the Mississippi came to assume a higher priority in Washington, and the Texas campaign was postponed. Only after July, 1863, with the Mississippi in their hands, could the Federals revive their early plans for Texas.

They envisaged a two-pronged attack on northeast Texas. General Banks at New Orleans was ordered to march his 30,000 Union troops up the Red River from Alexandria through Natchitoches and Shreveport into Texas. Simultaneously, Major General Frederick Steele, the Federal commander in Arkansas, had instructions to advance his army toward

Shreveport and thus provide the second arm of the Yankee thrust into Texas.

Since Banks depended upon the support of thirteen ironclads and some forty-five other vessels of the U.S. Navy, he had to wait until the spring of 1864 for enough water in the Red River to launch his campaign. Finally, on March 12, the drive on Texas got underway. It represented one of the major strategic goals of the Union for 1864, and it should have succeeded. The South was nearing the end of its resources; the North predicted a quick victory. Bank's chief adversary, General Kirby Smith, was well aware of his enemy's intention. At Shreveport he faced two opposing armies, one approaching from the north, the other from the south. His objective, therefore, was to defeat these forces in detail before they could be joined in northern Louisiana. Kirby Smith therefore dispatched General Richard Taylor, with an army of 12,500 men, to halt Banks' invasion up the Red River. He himself stood ready to repel the army of Steele marching down from Arkansas.<sup>50</sup>

Polignac's Brigade, to which Bruton's regiment was assigned, played a large role in Taylor's plans. On March 9, the general ordered the brigade to pull back from the Ouachita to Alexandria to meet Banks' attack up the Red River. Polignac's force, harrassing the Yankees constantly, withdrew slowly ahead of Banks' advance from March 14 to April 7, until they joined Taylor's main army three miles south of Mansfield, Louisiana. Here Taylor chose to make his stand.

Having retreated for almost a month, Captain Bruton was spoiling for a fight. He begged his regimental commander to allow him to lead his boys into action. But Bruton's company was plagued by one of the most persistent and pervasive deficiencies in the Confederate forces: many of the men had no arms and had consequently never been drilled in their use. They could only wait and hope that the capture of Union weapons would give them the wherewithal to defend themselves. Because it was still undrilled and unarmed, Company G was ordered to remain behind to guard the supply wagons when the regiment moved into action the next day.<sup>51</sup> Thus Bruton became a witness but not a participant in the Battle of Mansfield on April 8, 1864.

He watched as his brigade swept across the field under murderous fire in the first great Rebel charge late in the afternoon. Banks' army was stunned, then staggered by the fury of the attack. A Federal brigade was outflanked; the Confederates captured large numbers of prisoners. The Yankee line broke, and their retreat turned into a disorganized flight from the battlefield. As night closed in, the Confederates broke off their pursuit about three miles to the south.

Elated by his victory, Taylor resolved to deliver a death blow to his retreating enemy the next day. Twelve miles down the road, the



Rebels caught up with Banks' army at Pleasant Hill. But this time the Federal troops held their own, repulsed Taylor's repeated charges with heavy losses, and covered their retreat to the south.<sup>54</sup> Once again Bruton was denied his fight. On the morning of April 9, he marched his company into the front line. But his troops were still without arms or ammunition, so the Captain had to countermarch his men to the rear in order to draw their weapons from captured supplies. By the time Company G returned to Pleasant Hill, night had fallen and both sides were breaking off the engagement. Bruton's company had marched twenty-eight miles that day and had never gotten in on the fight. It was just as well.

Their view of the aftermath of battle subdued considerably the spirit of Bruton's men. "My boys was verry anxious to go into the first fight," he reported.

But the next morning when we marched through the battle field, the dead still on the field, it seem[ed to] strike them verry sensible. They did not say much more about not being allowed to go in the day before. But still when we wear going on the field that evening they stood it verry well.<sup>55</sup>

Casualties were heavy during the two days of combat. The 17th Texas alone lost twenty-three killed and forty-five wounded. Among the dead were Bruton's divisional commander, his regimental commander, and his regimental executive officer.<sup>56</sup>

General Taylor was resolved to pursue and destroy the disorganized Federal forces as they withdrew to the south and achieve thereby a notable Confederate victory. But at the critical moment, on April 10, Kirby Smith ordered Taylor to break off pursuit and bring the main body of his troops against Steele, advancing through southern Arkansas toward Shreveport. By April 16, Steele's army of 10,400 had reached Camden. After two sharp engagements with the Rebel defenders, however, the Union general was persuaded to withdraw back to Little Rock. At Jenkins' Ferry, on April 30, the pursuing Confederates caught up with their enemy. In an appalling slaughter in the bogs and mire, 1700 men were killed and wounded that day. The Yankees were unable to hold their ground; the Rebels were too weak to give chase.

It was much the same story on the Red River. Banks withdrew slowly down the river toward its confluence with the Mississippi. At every bend of the stream, abnormally low water threatened to strand his splendid little fleet of gunboats, and it proved an agonizing and costly task to drag them out over the shallows. Polignac, who had succeeded to a divisional command, was detached to pursue them, harrass them, and hold them, if possible. Company G of the 17th Regiment, now stiffened by captured Yankee equipment, was part of his command.

Step by step, the Union army retreated through Natchitoches, Alexandria, and Simmesport, while Bruton's regiment blocked, ambushed, and harrassed it at every opportunity. But the Rebel force was too small to inflict a decisive defeat and by May 20, Banks had slipped away to the Mississippi and the protection of the U.S. Navy.<sup>31</sup>

He left utter ruin and desolation in his wake. The northern troops systematically burned villages, farms, and crops wherever they could reach them. As usual, those who suffered most were the blacks. Hundreds of Negroes had taken refuge with Banks' army in its advance, rejoicing that the "Linkum gunboats" had come to liberate them. Now, with the Federal troops in retreat, they became helpless refugees, crushed between the armies. A Union officer recorded one vignette which summed up the hopelessness of their plight:

One wagon contained a half-dozen Negro babies, of assorted sizes, belonging to the colored Americans gathered to us since we started, which had been left there, stuck in the slough, drawn there by the feeblest of all possible mules, that was just executing his last drowning kick as we waded by.<sup>32</sup>

On May 26, a Federal transport loaded with about 175 Negro refugees was ambushed by the Rebels. A Confederate shell burst its boiler, and the steam scalded to death a hundred of them within minutes. All but three others died within the day.<sup>33</sup>

Blacks serving in the Union armies could expect little mercy if captured by the Rebels. A courier in Bruton's brigade remembered "a dead negro in the road, in Yankee uniform, over whom a hundred waggons have rolled. He is mangled until he has scarcely any resemblance of the human shape."<sup>34</sup> And in the wake of the Union retreat, Captain Bruton himself stumbled upon this grisly scene:

Late after the last fight the Yanks left a good many of their sick Negros in the woods—soldiers. Our boys found some of them. They said they had bin their 7 or 8 days without seeing any person. They [had] a quantity of maggots on them. Some had small pox. They were killed. Some the boys are taking care of and trying to save.<sup>35</sup>

Such grim and futile consequences were typical of the Red River Campaign in its entirety. The Union had squandered 8162 men; the Rebels lost 6575. It was a costly, humiliating failure for both sides. The inability of the Union generals to unite their forces before Shreveport and conquer Texas sapped and diverted Federal resources which could have been decisively employed in the East. Taylor could not destroy Banks' army in Louisiana; Kirby Smith was incapable of trapping Steele's command in Arkansas. The Confederates had averted an invasion but lost their one chance to reconquer the Trans-Mississippi. Disillusionment, recrimination, and uncertainty were the result.

Bruton's regiment was left to exhaust itself in futile marches, bivouacs, and countermarches across northern Louisiana and southern Arkansas for the remainder of the summer. Their generals did not know what to do with them. A bitter quarrel erupted between Kirby Smith and Taylor; the latter was transferred to the East, and the chain of command was snarled. Because of their constant movement, the Texans were denied adequate supplies, and the troops became sick and discouraged. Bruton himself was plagued by constant headaches and fever. Because of the uncertain goals in command, rumor took the place of purposeful action. The grapevine had it that the Yankees were fighting among themselves; that Lee was defeating Grant in every encounter; that Grant had been killed by his own men; that the Federal Congress was ready to sue for peace. Through such a rumor, Ellen Bruton heard that her husband had been killed.<sup>31</sup>

The Captain was quick to reassure his wife that, indeed, he was still very much alive. By August, however, he was not at all certain that his then viable condition would long continue. "I feel so much like I was writing a will," he told her, "that I don't think I can write anything that can be understood." The event which inspired these lugubrious sentiments was the result of unwonted initiative on the part of the Confederate high command. On July 22, Richmond ordered Kirby Smith to ship all the Texans across the Mississippi to defend Mobile, then under Federal attack. When the Texas boys got wind of their generals' plans for them, they took it like a death sentence. As Bruton put it, "It is a verry searious matter . . . to leave our homes and familys exposed to the enemy and to go to a country where we can't even hear from our familys." "I would not be surprised," he admitted, "if a great many of [the Texans] did not desert before starting. I don't think they can be carried across the river."<sup>32</sup>

And desert they did. Overnight, 140 men slipped away from the brigade; Bruton's regiment lost 7. The Captain was caught in a dilemma of duty. On the one hand, he could hardly condone desertion, whatever his feelings. "I hate very much to go myself," he admitted to his wife, "but I will never desert . . . I am doing all in my power to prevent desertion." On the other hand, the more men who deserted, the greater the likelihood that the repugnant order would be rescinded. "If not," Bruton predicted, "this army is ruined."<sup>33</sup>

The Captain's dilemma was shared by his commander, Kirby Smith. Fully aware that a complex amphibious operation designed to ferry thousands of his troops across a great river entirely controlled by his enemy was simply impossible, the general was far from enthusiastic about the transfer order. Wholesale desertions from his command provided the evidence he needed to convince Richmond that the plan would

never work. On August 22, therefore, Kirby Smith revoked the order for the transfer across the Mississippi. The Rebel high command simply had to swallow this decision.

Having abandoned his projected move across the river, the department commander had to find some employment for his troops. He endorsed, therefore, a futile and ill-conceived plan for a Confederate raid into Missouri. This fiasco threatened to draw the full fury of the Federal army into southern Arkansas, so Bruton's regiment was dispatched to that quarter, where the Texans tramped wearily from one wretched encampment to the other for most of the fall. Then, having exhausted all supplies and forage in Arkansas, they were ordered into camps in northern Louisiana for the last winter of the war.<sup>39</sup>

This dreary succession of march and countermarch nevertheless represented the lesser of two evils for the boys of Company G. Bruton reported that despite the hardships, "no body grumbles since the order for crossing the river has been revoked."<sup>40</sup> Still, nobody knew where they were going or why. A wet autumn not only lengthened the sick list but also rendered bivouac life generally miserable. There was little food to be had for men or mules. Tobacco cost \$15 a plug. Many of the men were marching barefoot, and Bruton was down to his last pair of drawers. Late in the fall of 1864 a short furlough home provided a respite from the rigors of life in camp, but he had to return to his unit before Christmas.<sup>41</sup> The Captain's mood on that holiday may be gauged from the following passage written to his wife:

To day is Christmas day and I am in camp. I don't think I ever studied so much about you & the children in one day before in all my life. It is a verry lonesome day here. Oh what would I of give to of been with you and the children to day. I imagine that you are in about the same condition to day that I am: mind floating over the whole world all most.<sup>42</sup>

By this time the sands of the Confederacy were rapidly running out. Throughout the South, the transportation system was at the point of collapse. A gloomy spirit of disunion dogged the Confederacy, while desertion, disaffection, and the chronic shortage of money and materiel rendered its armies increasingly impotent. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had been decimated beyond recovery by the punishment endured at Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, and Petersburg. During the fall, Sherman had driven his column of devastation across Georgia, splitting the Old South in two. Lincoln's war policy had received a renewed mandate in the November elections. By the beginning of 1865, the North was poised for the final great offensive.

Blocked from participating in these crucial events by the "impassable barrier" of the Mississippi, the armies of Kirby Smith could do little more than look on as the decisive developments unfolded to the



east. Then on March 7, 1865, a threat nearer home set the armies of the Trans-Mississippi Department in motion again. Kirby Smith received an urgent report that forty thousand Yankees were on their way from New Orleans to invade the Texas Coast. Hastily he mobilized his troops and ordered them to concentrate in the area around Houston to repel the expected Union attack. Bruton's regiment marched through East Texas and arrived at Hempstead on March 30.

But the Yankee invasion failed to materialize. Instead, the Confederacy collapsed. The official announcement of Lee's surrender at Appomattox reached the soldiers at Hempstead on April 21. While the troops reacted with understandable dejection and apathy, Kirby Smith, a number of his generals, and a few of the politicians were not yet ready to quit. Let Houston become the heart of the Glorious Cause, they urged; let us "fight unto the end." But as the weeks of indecision dragged on, the army rapidly disintegrated. Kirby Smith finally surrendered his forces on June 2, 1865. Bruton's brigade had already been disbanded by its commander on May 24, and the men trudged wearily homeward to face a new era in American history."

Who was this man who found his way back to his East Texas farm late in the spring? Captain Bruton was no hero. He did not distinguish himself by his boldness, dash, or initiative, and he never showed any inclination to risk his life or that of his men beyond the normal call of duty. If he had ever had any illusions about the nobility of the cause for which he was fighting, these had long since been dispelled by the squalid reality of war. Had there been an honorable way out, he would have spent the last half of the conflict running his farm. Bruton had pride in his company and regiment and rejoiced when the men acquitted themselves well. But he never revealed any hatred, enmity, or even resentment toward the enemy, except when they pursued their wanton course of destruction through Louisiana. Bruton saw in the Yankees what he recognized in himself: men trapped in war out of a sense of duty.

It was duty which kept him at his post to the end, worrying about his men like a father. Throughout it all, however, Bruton maintained his perspective through the gift of gentle irony that he possessed, and he never took himself too seriously. The Captain's character also reveals a strain of kindness and decency. His eyes were not shut even to the sufferings of the blacks, which could be most conveniently ignored. He was a man deeply in love with his wife and family, the intensity of which he fully discovered only when torn apart from them. But perhaps most of all, Bruton was in love with his land, his fields, his farm: his home. And it was to this home that he now returned.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>J. H. to E. Burton, Little Rock, Ark., May 24, 1862, *Joseph Bruton Letters* (hereinafter cited as *BL*), East Texas Collection, Boynton Library, Stephen F. Austin State University.

<sup>2</sup>E. Wallace, *Texas in Turmoil* (Austin, 1965), 58-79; S. B. Oates, "Texas Under the Secessionists," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* (hereinafter cited as *SHQ*), LXVII, No. 2 (Oct., 1963), 165-190; A. C. Ashcraft, *Texas in the Civil War* (Austin, 1962), 8-12, and "East Texas in the Election of 1860 and the Secession Crisis," *East Texas Historical Journal* (hereinafter cited as *ETHJ*), I, No. 1 (July, 1963), 11-13; R. A. Wooster, "Life in Civil War East Texas," *ETHJ*, III, No. 2 (Oct., 1965), 93-94; Jimmie Hicks, "Texas and Separate Independence," *ETHJ*, IV, No. 2 (Oct., 1966), 92-101. For a discussion of the accuracy of the figures on the popular vote for secession, see J. T. Timmons, "The Referendum in Texas on the Ordinance of Secession, February 23, 1861: The Vote," *ETHJ*, XI, No. 2 (Fall, 1973), 12-28.

<sup>3</sup>C. R. Ericson, *The People of Nacogdoches County in 1860: An Edited Census* (Nacogdoches, 1978), 111; County Court Records, Nacogdoches County, Tex.

<sup>4</sup>U. S. National Archives, *Confederate Archives*, Chap. 6, File 140, p. 31; S. B. Oates, *Confederate Cavalry West of the River* (Austin, 1961), 26; 34-38, 44, 47-51, 175.

<sup>5</sup>T. L. Snead, "The Conquest of Arkansas," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (ed. by R. U. Johnson and C. C. Buel, 4 vols., New York, 1884-1888) III, 441-445.

<sup>6</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Shreveport, May 1, and Little Rock, May 24, 1862, *BL*; R. R. Wise, ed., "The Letters of Lt. Flavius W. Perry, 17th Texas Cavalry, 1862-1863," *Military History of Texas and the Southwest* (hereinafter cited as *MHTS*), XIII, No. 2 (1976), 12-14.

<sup>7</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Little Rock, May 24, 1862, *BL*.

<sup>8</sup>Wise, "Letters of Lt. Flavius W. Perry," 14-15; N. C. Delaney, ed., "The Diary and Memoirs of Marshall Samuel Pierson," *MHTS*, XIII, No. 3 (1976), 24-27; Snead, "Conquest of Arkansas," 445.

<sup>9</sup>U. S. National Archives, *Confederate Archives*, Roster, 17th Texas Consolidated Cavalry; Wise, "Letters of Lt. Flavius W. Perry," 15-22; Delaney, "Diary . . . of M. S. Pierson," 27.

<sup>10</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp Hope, Ark., Sept. 27, 1862, *BL*.

<sup>11</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp Nelson, Ark., Oct. 21, 1862, *BL*.

<sup>12</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Little Rock, May 24, 1862, *BL*.

<sup>13</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp Hope, Ark., Sept. 27, 1862, *BL*.

<sup>14</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp near Clarendon, Ark., Oct. 7, 1862, *BL*.

<sup>15</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Little Rock, May 24, 1862, *BL*.

<sup>16</sup>Snead, "Conquest to Arkansas," 448-450; Wise, "Letters of Lt. Flavius W. Perry," 22-25; Delaney, "Diary . . . of M. S. Pierson," 27.

<sup>17</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp Hope, Ark., Oct. 13, 1862, *BL*.

<sup>18</sup>*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (128 vols., Washington, D. C., 1880-1901), Ser. I, XVII, pt. I, 705; Snead, "Conquest of Arkansas," 450-451.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Wise, "Letters of Lt. Flavius W. Perry," 27.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 29-30; *War of the Rebellion*, Ser. I, XVII, Pt. I, 612, 780-788, 790-796; Sneed, "Conquest of Arkansas," 450-453.

<sup>20</sup>U. S. National Archives, *Confederate Archives*, Chap. 6, File No. 140, p. 31, and File No. 178, p. 5; Wise, "Letters of Lt. Flavius W. Perry," 30-37; W. B. Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons* (Columbus, Ohio, 1930), 89, 178-181; *War of the Rebellion*, Ser. II, V, 176, 203, 477-478, 933-934, 937.

<sup>21</sup>U. S. National Archives, *Confederate Archives*, Chap. 6, File No. 178, 5, 31; Alwyn Barr, *Polignac's Texas Brigade*, [Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association, Publication Series, VIII, No. 1] (n.p., 1964), 21-22, 28-38; Joseph H. Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith, C. S. A.* (Baton Rouge, 1954), 259, 324-326, 330, 336-337; J. D. Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1963), 301-314; Delaney, "Diary . . . of M. S. Pierson," 29-32.

<sup>22</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp Allen, Jan. 1, 1854, *BL*.

<sup>23</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp Allen, Jan. 1, 1864, *BL*.

<sup>24</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp in the Field, June 5, and Camp McNutt Hill, July 9, 1864.

<sup>25</sup>L. H. Johnson, *Red River Campaign: Politics and Cotton in the Civil War* (Baltimore, 1958), 5-22, 33-39, 79-89.

<sup>26</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp near Mansfield, April 12, 1864, *BL*. In Oct., 1862, for example, more than a quarter of the 27,000 troops in the Trans-Mississippi Department remained unarmed. See Oates, *Confederate Cavalry West of the River*, 71, fn. 55.

<sup>27</sup>Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 124-169; Parks, *Kirby Smith*, 387-391; Barr, *Polignac's Texas Brigade*, 35-41; R. Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction* (ed. by R. B. Harwell, New York, 1955), 194-212; R. W. Smith and M. Mullins, eds., "Diary of H. C. Medford, Confederate Soldier, 1864," *SHQ*, XXXIV, No. 3 (Jan. 1931), 211-230.

<sup>28</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp near Mansfield, April 12, 1864, *BL*.

<sup>29</sup>Barr, *Polignac's Texas Brigade*, 39-41.

<sup>30</sup>Barr, *Polignac's Texas Brigade*, 41-47.

<sup>31</sup>A. F. Sperry, as quoted in Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 201.

<sup>32</sup>Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, 222-223.

<sup>33</sup>Smith and Mullins, "Diary of H. C. Medford," 220-221.

<sup>34</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp in the Field, May 30, 1864, *BL*.

<sup>35</sup>Parks, *Kirby Smith*, 403-420; J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp on Old River, April 26, 1864, Camp in the Field, June 11 and June 22, 1864, and Camp McNutt Hill, July 9-10, 1864, *BL*; Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 278.

<sup>36</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp, August 18-19, 1864, *BL*.

<sup>37</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp, August 18-19, 1864, *BL*.

<sup>38</sup>Parks, *Kirby Smith*, 420-441; Barr, *Polignac's Texas Brigade*, 48-52.

<sup>39</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp in the Field, Aug. 30, 1864, *BL*.

<sup>40</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp in the Field, June 7, 1864, Camp near Camden, Ark., Oct. 5, 1864, and Camp Allen, December 18, 1864, *BL*.

<sup>41</sup>J. H. to E. Bruton, Camp Allen, Dec. 25, 1864, *BL*.

<sup>42</sup>Parks, *Kirby Smith*, 441-478; Barr, *Polignac's Texas Brigade*, 54-56; Wooster, "Life in Civil War East Texas," 98-99.